



Comparative Assessment of Intonational Variations between Igbo-English and Ibibio-English Bilingual Speech among higher institution graduates in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study contrastively analyzed the use of intonation in the spoken English of Igbo-English and Ibibio-English bilinguals. The main objective of the study was to identify the differences and similarities in their assigning of Intonation in order to ascertain their levels of international intelligibility. As qualitative and quantitative research, the study favours a survey design. The study area consisted of Igbo and Ibibio speaking areas with the population comprising graduates from Nigerian higher institutions which represents the educated variety of Nigerian English. The sample size consisted of 182 educated Igbo and Ibibio English speakers selected through random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire of, words, phrases and sentences drafted and validated by English language scholars. A recording device was used to record the production of the respondents which was transferred to a computer for analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the Igbo-English and Ibibio-English vary greatly from the Standard English. The study, however, revealed that there are no significant differences in the pattern of assigning tunes in the spoken English of Igbo and Ibibio English bilinguals. This study recommended that Nigerian schools should procure and use instruments/devices that aid spoken English.

Keywords: Intonation, Contrastive analysis, Igbo-English bilinguals, Ibibio-English bilinguals

Introduction

The challenges of spoken English in Nigeria can be traced to many factors. First, English has twenty vowels, while other Nigerian languages (like Igbo and Ibibio) have fewer vowel sounds. Some Nigerian vowels are very close to their English counterparts, while others are very different. To make matters worse, many English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers find it challenging to pronounce English words correctly since some English vowels do not resemble the vowels in their native language. At the highest segmental level of linguistic analysis, English is intonational, while other Nigerian languages are tonal. According to Obi-Okoye (2008), this distinction distinguishes English from the native languages of most ESL students with respect to stress pattern, rhythm, pause, accent, and intonation (p.25). Because of this reliance on intonation, the placement of emphasis is not rigid in English. For most Nigerian languages, such as Yoruba, Hausa, Ibibio, and Igbo, the correct oral production is wholly dependent on a different kind of stress realised through the tonal manipulation affecting the quality of speech as high, medial, or low, and this is true even for discriminating grammatical categories. Anyanwu (2016) asserts: The stress or tonal position of the Igbo language is almost permanently fixed on the vowel, particularly since words usually begin and end with a vowel, to realize vowel – consonant – vowel (VCV) scheme. The only consonant sounds which carry some elements of tone in Igbo, for example, are syllabic nasals such as /m/, /n/ and /nw/. The slightest mistake in applying the correct tone, not stress as it is the case with English, changes the entire meaning. (p. 25). Akere (2004) argues that because English is learned as a second language, rather than attempting to handle two phonological systems separately, what actually happens is an adaptation of the indigenous phonological system for speech sounds and pattern (p. 107). This occurs, for example, when a Nigerian-born English-speaker completely eliminates the distinction between long and short vowels and similar nuances. This demonstrates that no two languages are grammatically equivalent, making literal translation across languages highly unlikely. Given that many educated Nigerians from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds speak English differently, leading to the ethnic varieties of English, it is expected that their speech production will exhibit different prosodic features which are worth investigating. Having seen lots of research works on the segmental features of English in contrast with the sub varieties of Nigerian English and, it is imperative, therefore, that attention should be given to contrastive analysis at the supra- segmental level with a major and minor variety. Thus, the present study contrastively analyses the use of intonation in the spoken English of Igbo-English and Ibibio- English bilinguals.

Statement of the Problem

There is a high level of phonological incongruities between the spoken Nigerian Englishes and the Standard English especially at the prosodic level. These clashes have led to some level of unintelligibility of Nigerian varieties. Igbo, Hausa,



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and Yoruba Englishes has been studied and discovered to have this challenge of intelligibility. Consequently, it is equally necessary to undertake a study of two or more varieties of English in Nigeria to contrastively determine their supra-segmental features, the areas of similarities and differences in these features, as well as to determine which variety has a better representation of the English supra-segmental sounds than the other(s). Therefore, this research is to contrast Igbo and Ibibio Englishes on their use of intonation towards ascertaining which variety is closer to the Standard English.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. identify the differences between the use of intonation in the English spoken by Igbo-English and Ibibio English bilinguals;
2. highlight the similarities in the use of intonation in the spoken English of Igbo-English and Ibibio-English bilinguals.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions will be adopted to guide the study.

1. What are the differences in the use of intonation in spoken English of Igbo-English and Ibibio-English bilinguals?
2. What are the similarities in use of intonation in the spoken English of the Igbo-English and Ibibio-English bilinguals?

Significance of the Study

This study is that its findings will be beneficial to language teachers and students who will find the study useful for ESL teaching and learning purposes. While it will help the teachers in their coordination of learning activities and will facilitate their application of the most appropriate approaches to focus on specific problem areas where the L2 learners of English in Nigerian schools have difficulty in mastering the prosodic aspects of English phonology, it will also help to proffer solutions to some of the challenges that the students face in their spoken English learning process.

Literature Review

Intonation in the English Language

Not everyone speaks at the same pitch and volume when conversing normally. A language's intonation is made up of variations in pitch as well as other speech characteristics like loudness and length. Pitch range variation and other features of voice are together referred to as "intonation." Munim (2015) posits that intonation is a property of pronunciation that is common to all languages. Accent, linked speech, rhythm, and emphasis are other factors that affect pronunciation. Tone, like these other elements, is about how we say something, not what we say. Thus, we might define intonation as the manner in which we convey specific ideas and moods through the pitch of our voice. It can "differentiate between many interpretations that have the ability to turn the declarative statement into an interrogative one" (Mirfatemi et al., 2020, p. 23). The rise or decline in voice quality is related to intonation and pitch is included in it. Ufot (2009, p. 63) defines pitch as "the relative depth or height that is conveyed by speech level." The majority of Nigerian languages are tonal, which implies "that words—not sentences—or words with sentence status are what cause the voice to rise and fall," according to Udofot (2007, p. 23), who is analysing Nigerian English. "In English, a lot of the attitude implied by tone is lost," the writer says. In English, intonation also has grammatical significance. A declaration of truth is expressed in a different tone than a request, expression of thanks, etc. The tone employed in a speech is influenced by the speaker's own mood. Since people's emotions cannot be universally agreed upon, Eka (1993, p. 83) contends that intonation might instead be defined as "...mostly unique, customary within a community, and typically varying across individuals." According to Eka (1996), the unique quirks may be mostly chosen depending on the speaker's educational background, which affects the range of Nigerian English spoken, including non-standard, basic, standard/educated, and sophisticated/near native.

In English, intonation also refers to variations in rhythm and stress in addition to changes in voice pitch. Different emotional meanings, such as surprise, boredom, rage, wariness, etc., are conveyed by intonation (Britannica, 2020b). Tone serves the grammatical purpose of distinguishing one kind of phrase or sentence from another in several languages, including English. As a result, "Your name is John" is a straightforward statement that starts with a medium pitch and ends with a lower one (falling intonation); conversely, "Your name is John?" poses a question and has a rising intonation (high final pitch). According to Smith (2002), the term 'intonation' is used in two senses - a wide and a limited sense. The phrase was employed above in its broadest definition. The word refers to information that is generally communicated through prosodic qualities. When used in a restricted context, the term refers to information that is expressed by pitch during a speech

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segment longer than a word. Both grammatical and non-grammatical information can be communicated by intonation. The linguistic information is sent to differentiate phrases inside sentences through characteristics of their borders and by drawing contrasts between commands and requests, inquiries and declarations. Non-grammatical information is sent to indicate the speaker's attitudes and feelings towards the subject, including warmth and coldness, enthusiasm and boredom, and politeness and rage. Form and function are the two fundamental facets of intonation that we examine. Function is the grammatical and pragmatic information that is expressed by intonation. Whereas pragmatic information pertains to the meaning of a speech based on its context, grammatical information relates to the linguistic meaning of an utterance. Pitch and other associated aspects of speech are used to express intonation. Gimson (1980) proposes that intonation is relevant in English by its performance of two main functions: accentual, in the sense that pitch alterations are the most efficient technique of rendering a syllable or word more apparent; and non-accentual, that intonation may be used to differentiate between assertions and inquiries. As a means of expressing our sentiments in relation to what we are saying, this second function will also assist to reveal the speaker's emotional views. Therefore, English uses tone to convey both personal attitude and grammatical structure, such as distinguishing between questions and assertions (Uribe, 1989, p. 55). A rising or falling tone can be distinguished fairly easily, but the fall-rise and rise-fall tones are more challenging to distinguish when they are prolonged because the syllable structure frequently breaks or distorts their pitch changes (Roach, 2009). This also implies that intonation may not be gainfully studied without resort to an examination of the pitch of the language being studied. From the ongoing, it is very clear that the different supra-segmental sounds of English are connected to one another. In other words, none can actually function or be realized without relating or connecting to the other. This is why it becomes important that in spite of discussing them individually for clarity's sake, supra-segmental features interconnect in English. Just as every language has its segmental sounds, each also has its supra-segmental sounds, English inclusive. Similar to how stress influences an utterance's meaning, intonation similarly fluctuates to produce differences in the speaker's emphasis, inference, attitude, etc. All languages communicate modulations of the meaning represented by words through variations in pitch during an utterance. Tonality in English may impact a sentence or a whole speech. Pitch rises and falls in a certain way show intonation. There is a distinction between a question and a statement in the English language. An example of a statement is "She is coming," which has a pitch drop on the final syllable. It becomes a query when spoken with an increase in pitch on the final word (She is coming). When Pike observes that many intonation contours have specific meanings, he means this. Pitch variations can also indicate other types of information, such as the speaker's emotional state—such as whether they are pleased, sad, or angry—as well as information regarding the grammatical structure of the sentence. It is challenging to pinpoint the precise meaning differences that are conveyed by various intonation patterns, because they vary slightly between languages and within English dialects. This is the driver whose particulars were seized.

It is an interesting book; I will buy it.

Say the truth, shames the devil.

Many Expressions: Extended utterances consist of several phrases that, with the exception of the final clause, which adopts a falling tune, all have an intrinsic rising tune on the final stressed syllable.

The Governor attended the occasion, addressed it, donated a long bus, and left for another function.

He arrived, greeted, zoomed away.

He came, saw, conquered, and left.

The pastor worship, praised, preached and blessed the congregation.

Tag Questions: In this case, the tune goes up for the last section, which is the question tag, and down for the first half, which is a statement.

The books are cheap, Aren't they?

The rain will fall, Won't it?

You will travel, won't you?

I have some money, don't I?

Either-or Expressions

Either he is good or he is bad.

Either you go to work or you lose your salary.

Either you stay here or you leave.

Either you talk or I punish you.

It is the combination of stress and intonation that gives accentuation. Accentuation is the process of making one or more syllable structures stand out more than the rest. "Accentuation pertains to the entire amount of effort a speaker expends

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when articulating a syllable," according to Eka (2009, p. 91). Pitch, time length, and stress are all considered in accentuation. Stress indicates how loud a speaker is perceived by the listener. Speaking Nigerian English in nonstandard and basic variations, speakers have "no fixed accentual pattern," according to scholars studying the languages spoken form (Eka, 2000, p. 91), and accentuation varies from inventive to educated or almost native realisation. It should be noted that a speaker's accent may reveal a lot about their educational background, degree of comprehension when speaking, and type of spoken Nigerian English they employ.

Theoretical Framework

This work employed two theories: Contrastive Analysis and Metrical Phonology theory.

Contrastive Analysis

The choice of this theory is informed by the aim of the study which is a contrastive analysis of analysis of the use of intonation of the languages under study. Apparently, this exercise can best be hinged on Contrastive Analysis. The theoretical foundation for Contractive Analysis Hypothesis was formulated in Robert Lado's book titled: *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*. Contrastive analysis is the comparison of two equivalent portions of two different languages which is usually the first language of the learner and the target language. Lado (1957) claimed that those elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple to learn and those elements that are different will pose a problem.

Presentation of Results

Analysis of the Test on Intonation

Voice quality fluctuation is related to intonation. Pitch is included. The relative height or depth that is conveyed in the voice level during communication is referred to as pitch. Phrases that represented the falling tune, the rising tune, and the combined tunes employed in this study were used as examples for the intonation analysis. The tunes of the sentences are indicated by the use of arrows – either upward or downward strokes to indicate the control's tunes. The strokes slanting upwards or sloping downwards reveal the melodies employed by the control. The voices of the respondents are captured and at the end of the recording, the tape recorder is played again and the readers' voices transcribed by the researcher.

Simple Declarative Statements:

The orange is sweet. ↘
 The man is great. ↘
 I went to the supermarket today. ↘
 I saw him yesterday. ↘
 The book is interesting. ↘

Table 1 Analysis of Respondents from Igbo-English Bilinguals on Declaratives

Respondents	NAU	Alvan	Imsu	Umunze	Total	Percentage
Number of correct tune	21	22	19	20	82	90%
Number of incorrect tune	2	1	4	2	9	10%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Table 2 Analysis of Respondents from Ibibio-English Bilinguals on Declarative

Respondents	University of Uyo	Univ. of Calabar	AISU	CRSU	Total	Percentage
Number of correct stress placement	18	20	18	19	75	82%
Number of incorrect stress placement	5	3	5	3	16	18%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

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Command or Order:

Go there ↘
Get him punished ↘
Call him now ↘
Sit down and listen ↘
Eat your food. ↘

Table 3. Analysis of Respondents from Igbo-English Bilinguals on Commands

Respondents	NAU	Alvan	Imsu	Umunze	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	20	19	19	20	78	86%
Number of Incorrect Tune	3	4	4	2	13	14%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Table 4. Analysis of Respondents from Ibibio-English Bilinguals on Commands

Respondents	University of Uyo	Univ. of Calabar	AISU	CRSU	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	21	18	19	18	76	84%
Number of Incorrect Tune	2	5	4	4	15	16%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

WH- Questions:

What's your name? ↘
Where's the computer? ↘
How are you doing? ↘
When are you coming? ↘
What did he say? ↘

Table 5. Analysis of Respondents from Igbo-English Bilinguals on WH- Questions

Respondents	NAU	Alvan	Imsu	Umunze	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	21	22	21	20	84	92%
Number of Incorrect Tune	2	1	2	2	7	8%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Table 6. Analysis of Respondents from Ibibio-English Bilinguals on WH- Questions

Respondents	University of Uyo	Univ. of Calabar	AISU	CRSU	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	22	21	21	21	85	93%
Number of Incorrect Tune	1	2	2	1	6	3%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Exclamations:

Gracious God! ↘
Ah, I've lost my pen! ↘
↘

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Oh, this is bad!

Wow, it is interesting!

Ah, this is bad!

Table 7 Analysis of Respondents from Igbo-English Bilinguals on Exclamations

Respondents	NAU	Alvan	Imsu	Umunze	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	23	23	23	22	91	100%
Number of Incorrect Tune	0	0	0	0	00	00%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Table 8. Analysis of Respondents from Ibibio-English Bilinguals on Exclamations

Respondents	University of Uyo	Univ. of Calabar	AISU	CRSU	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	23	23	23	22	91	100%
Number of incorrect stress placement	0	0	0	0	0	00%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Firm gratitude:

God bless you.

Thank you.

You are blessed.

Keep it up.

Table 9 Analysis of Respondents from Igbo-English Bilinguals on Firm Gratitude

Respondents	NAU	Alvan	Imsu	Umunze	Total	Percentage
Number of Correct Tune	21	22	19	20	82	90%
Number of Incorrect Tune	2	1	4	2	9	10%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

Table 10. Analysis of Respondents from Ibibio-English Bilinguals on Firm Gratitude

Respondents	University of Uyo	Univ. of Calabar	AISU	CRSU	Total	Percentage
Number of correct stress placement	18	20	18	19	75	82%
Number of incorrect stress placement	5	3	5	3	16	18%
Total	23	23	23	22	91	100%

The data analysis of the data above showed that, whereas some individuals had almost the same amount of anticipated intonation phrases, our respondents behaved differently on anticipated intonation phrases. Some of our participants served as excellent examples of this, having either directly interacted with native speakers or established their own native speech patterns. This indicates that accentual pattern is improved by interaction with native speakers. Additionally, it was noted that our subjects had a greater proportion of falling and rising songs than rise-fall and fall-rise tunes. Another finding was that there were variations in the distribution of intonation phrases among our individuals, even when their intonation phrases were almost exactly as predicted (fall-rise and rise-fall). Once more, the differences in each respondent's unique performance were due to differing levels of competence determined by their interactions with native English speakers and their command of the language. The study likewise noted that the shift in accentual pattern may not create communication

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barrier among Igbo speakers of English, but may be a challenge to the native or near-native speakers of the English language.

Conclusion

From the findings, we conclude that there are no remarkable differences between the Igbo-English and Ibibio-English in their use of intonation. It is clear from the study that the results of the perceptual/statistical and acoustic analyses as retrieved from the responses of the respondents that the Igbo-English and Ibibio-English vary greatly from the control's version which is the Standard English. However, this shows that the type of English spoken by the participants is not the standard model of pronunciation but just a sub-variety of the varieties of Nigerian English (NE) despite their level of educational background.

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